



CONTACT:

Jeanne Mell
University City Science Center
215-966-6029
jmell@sciencecenter.org

Science Center's QED Program Makes Third Round of Awards to Life Sciences Researchers

PHILADELPHIA--(January 19, 2011) – A revolutionary cancer therapy, a novel treatment for hepatitis C and a “molecular toll booth” to measure microRNA molecules were each awarded \$200,000 from the University City Science Center’s QED Proof-of-Concept Program in January. The R&D funding includes \$100,000 from the Science Center and a \$100,000 match from each of the three supporting institutions: The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to the financial award, each of the three principal investigators will receive one year of continued business guidance to help them bring their technologies to market.

This is the third round of awards by the QED Program, the nation’s first multi-institutional proof-of-concept program for life science technologies. Awards are made to bridge the funding gap between research grants and commercial seed investment by awarding grants to life science technologies with high potential in the healthcare industry. The QED Program also pairs the researchers with Business Advisors who guide them in developing the business case to support their research strategies.

The three technologies are:

- A novel treatment for people infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV), using a cutting-edge microRNA technology that interferes with the ability of the virus to express its own genes, being developed by Linda B. Couto, Ph.D., Associate Director, Center for Cellular and Molecular Therapeutics, The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. The technique could overcome the problem of drug resistance that currently limits treatment options for this disease. Dr. Couto has received support from QED Business Advisor Jim Ballance.
- A protein-based therapy for acute myeloid leukemia (AML), being developed by George P. Tuszyński, Ph.D., Professor of Neuroscience at Temple University’s School of Medicine. Dr. Tuszyński’s protein shows promise in reverting cultured leukemic cells to normal cells. If this activity can be demonstrated in patients, it could revolutionize the standard of care for this important disease. Dr. Tuszyński has received guidance from QED Business Advisor Deni Zodda.
- A lab-on-a-chip tool for measuring microRNA molecules in a biological sample, being developed by a group at the University of Pennsylvania headed by Associate Professor of Physics, Marija Drndić, Ph.D. MicroRNAs regulate gene activity in normal and in disease states, but since they occur in cells at very low concentrations, accurately detecting and measuring them is a challenge. Dr. Drndić’s technology measures individual molecules passing through nanopores in an ultrathin silicon film (a “molecular toll booth”). The proposal received support from Business Advisors Pamela Hicks and Ronald Rothman.

“These projects represent the strength and diversity of scientific research in the Greater Philadelphia region,” says Stephen S. Tang, Ph.D., President and CEO of the University City Science Center. “However, a great idea and funding are often not enough to ensure success. The QED Program offers a community of support that includes life sciences industry

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experts, scientists and entrepreneurs who are working together to help these promising technologies have a meaningful impact on patient care.”

“Sourcing discovery-stage technologies from academic institutions is an important aspect of pipeline development for pharmaceutical and biotech companies,” says Susan Rohrer, Senior Director of External Scientific Affairs at Merck, who is a member of the QED Selection Team, which reviews the proposals. “The QED Proof-of-Concept Program supports the development of academic inventions with commercial potential and provides the marketplace with an early look at promising technologies from across the region. In addition to QED’s important contribution to economic development among the participant universities this program is immensely valuable for the pharma and biotech industries.”

Forty-five applications were submitted in June 2010 and reviewed by a team comprising pharmaceutical, medical device, and diagnostic industry representatives and regional investors. Ten projects were selected for “proof-of-concept” proposal development in August. The 10 selected scientists were paired with business advisors. In late December, the researchers presented to the selection team, which ultimately recommended three projects to receive funding. To view the complete list of selection team members and business advisors, go to <http://www.sciencecenter.org/programs/qed-proof-of-concept-program/selection-teams-and-advisors>.

The QED Program provides funding and business development support for academic researchers developing early-stage life science technologies with high commercial potential. The key goal of the program is to retire the business risk in these early-stage projects, increasing their attractiveness to follow-on investment by established life science companies and private investors. The QED Program integrates four elements that are critical to successfully and efficiently performing early-stage proof-of-concept technology assessments: business advice, market drivers, grant funding, and guidance to exit. The program was launched in April 2009. A fourth RFP will be released in late Spring 2011.

Eighteen universities and research institutions in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware participate in the QED Program: Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Delaware State University, Drexel University, Fox Chase Cancer Center, Harrisburg University of Science and Technology, Lankenau Institute for Medical Research, Lehigh University, Monell Chemical Senses Center, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, Rutgers University, Temple University, Thomas Jefferson University, University of Delaware, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, University of Pennsylvania, University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, Widener University and The Wistar Institute.

About the Science Center

The University City Science Center accelerates technology commercialization, regional economic development, and the market availability of life-enhancing scientific breakthroughs by bringing together innovations, scientists, entrepreneurs, funding, laboratory facilities, and business services. Established in 1963 and headquartered in Philadelphia, PA, the Science Center was the first, and remains the largest, urban research park in the United States. Graduate organizations and current residents of the University City Science Center’s Port business incubators have created more than 15,000 jobs that remain in the Greater Philadelphia region today and contribute more than \$9 billion to the regional economy annually. For more information about the Science Center, go to www.sciencecenter.org.